



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Division of Energy Resources Advises Massachusetts Consumers to Plan Ahead for Winter Heating Season

Energy Conservation and Efficiency Can Help Offset Record High Oil Prices

BOSTON – As energy prices continue to rise, the Massachusetts Division of Energy Resources (DOER) is advising consumers to prepare for winter by making homes more energy efficient and changing habits that can contribute to higher fuel bills in the months ahead.

“Winterizing your home during the fall can help ward off big fuel bills in the winter,” DOER Commissioner Philip Giudice said. “Massachusetts is starting the heating season with crude oil prices at record high levels, which increases prices for all petroleum products. We urge consumers to act now to alleviate the impact of these increases in their heating bills.”

DOER’s weekly survey of heating oil and propane prices, published today, indicates that heating oil in the Commonwealth is at a record high average of \$3.05 per gallon – marking the first time the average price has gone above \$3. At \$2.70 per gallon, propane is also at a record high this week. The price of heating oil has jumped 33.5 cents and propane 22 cents since DOER began its winter fuel price surveys October 9. These costs are being driven by crude oil prices that are fluctuating between \$92 and \$96 per barrel.

The following steps can help consumers reduce heating fuel consumption and costs this winter.

- Learn about state energy efficiency programs you may qualify for by visiting www.masssave.com. These ratepayer-funded programs established by the Commonwealth provide incentives for homeowners to install energy efficiency improvements, including the purchase of insulation and efficient windows and heating systems. The DOER points out that federal tax credits are available for several types of home improvements, including insulation and replacement windows, completed by December 31, 2007. Visit www.energystar.gov for details.

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- Stop leakage:
 - Repair broken or cracked glass, and putty older windows. Make sure windows close properly, window locks pull sashes together, and storm windows close completely.
 - Make sure doors close properly. Repair or replace non-working doorknobs, latches, and striker plates.
 - Weather-strip windows, doors and attic access routes. Caulk frames around windows and doors from the inside using clear, pliable caulk.
 - Seal air leaks with insulation in ceilings and attic floors, at baseboards and electric outlets in exterior walls (with outlet gaskets), and around exterior windows and doors.
 - Fit fireplaces with tightly sealing dampers and keep dampers closed when the fireplace is not in use. If a fireplace is used infrequently, use a chimney block to stop heat loss.
 - Caulk foundation cracks and openings.
- Fully insulate:
 - Check attic insulation and consider improving the R-value to R-38. Check that existing insulation is even, with no gaps or voids.
 - If walls aren't insulated, get a free energy audit through www.masssave.com, which will recommend whether to have them done. Insulation can be blown in from the outside, without disturbing interior walls, and subsidies of 20 to 50 percent are available through gas and electric utilities.
- Check heating systems:
 - Seal leaky air ducts and insulate ducts that run through unheated basements or attics using duct sealants called “mastics” made especially for this purpose.
 - Hire a professional to perform annual maintenance on your heating system, including replacing air filters.
 - Make sure that radiators and heat vents are not blocked. Bleed air from radiators in hot water systems to ensure that they fill completely.
 - Consider investing in new, energy-efficient heating equipment. (Most boilers and furnaces older than about 15 years waste a lot of fuel.)
 - Consider splitting your heating system into two zones for bedrooms and living areas and put timers on both thermostats to reduce heat in bedrooms during the day and in living areas at bedtime.
- Conserve:
 - Close off and turn down the heat in rooms not in use.
 - Install an Energy Star-rated thermostat and program it to turn down the heat when the household is asleep or away from home.
 - Insulate the first three feet of hot water pipes leading from your water heater, and install low-flow showerheads and faucet aerators.
 - Clean south-facing windows to take advantage of solar heat, and draw shades on north-facing ones.

More energy saving tips are available at www.mass.gov/winterheating. DOER's weekly heating oil and propane survey provides consumers with benchmarks against which to measure their own fuel prices, and will be posted at www.mass.gov/doer through March.